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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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This weekend, fans of Atari folklore will finally find out the answer to one of the iconic game company's most famous urban legend - did Atari bury a ton of Atari 2600 E.T. game cartridges in a New Mexico landfill? The story has been talked about for decades. but the question has gone unanswered, until now.

This weekend, that same rumored landfill will be dug up to determine whether or not the rumors are true. Personally, I hope that the dig is successful. And, I hope, perhaps there will be other "historical" discoveries that get unearthed.

I'm anticipating that next week's issue will contain the answers to these rumors. If you're as curious as I am, you'll be looking forward to reading the news of the dig!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Happy 25th Birthday, Game Boy!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 2k Games Announces Temporary Shutdown!
Diggers Ready To Unearth Atari s E.T.!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Happy 25th Birthday, Game Boy!

Game Boy, you re a Game Man now.

Nintendo s trailblazing Game Boy marks its 25th anniversary on Monday with the portable device s legacy living on in cutting-edge smartphone games and among legions of nostalgic fans.

The Japanese firm released its 8-bit Game Boy on April 21, 1989 the same year Soviet troops pulled out of Afghanistan, the Chinese army violently cracked down on protesters in Tiananmen Square, and the Berlin Wall fell.

Billed as a handy game machine, few knew it would turn the console-based industry on its head, starting a revolution that did for portable gaming what Sony s Walkman had done for mobile music.

It also helped turn Super Mario Bros. and Donkey Kong into global franchises, allowing gamers to change their favorite games on the go just by inserting small cartridges into the device.

Kyoto-based Nintendo, which started life as a games and card maker that morphed into a global videogame giant, did not invent portable gaming.

But Game Boy s discount price and popular software blew away the competition at the time and pushed mobile gaming into the mainstream.

At one point, portable gaming was synonymous with the Game Boy, said Serkan Toto, a Tokyo-based games industry consultant. It laid the foundation for what we call portable gaming today, regardless of whether it is console or smartphone games, because the basic concept is the same. That s the legacy of Game Boy.

Mobility was crucial, remembers one Japanese man, if he wanted to escape his parents wrath.

With a standing console, I needed to play in the living room where my parents were watching television they got angry at me for playing it all the time, the man, who did not wish to give his name, told AFP as he browsed inside Super Potato, a Tokyo store dedicated to retro gaming gadgets.

The device also allowed gamers to connect through a link cable, setting off the beginnings of online gaming networks that now number in the millions of players.

It made gaming portable, but what s great was it was built on the concept of networking, enabling users to connect and battle each other, said Hirokazu Hamamura, managing director at games research firm and magazine publisher Kadokawa Corp. in Tokyo.

A quarter century later, the company s financial fortunes have suffered.

Nintendo has no commemorative events planned for the Game Boy, which ironically foreshadowed the creation of portable smartphone and tablet computer games that have offered up stiff competition to stationary consoles such as Nintendo s Wii, the Sony PlayStation and Microsoft s Xbox.

The Game Boy was discontinued years ago. But in its heyday, Nintendo sold almost 119 million original Game Boy consoles and shifted another 81.5 million units of the next-generation Game Boy Advance series,

which was launched in 2001.

The original device s red buttons and cross-shaped directional pads may look clunky these days, but they evoke a sense of nostalgia for many fans, including Spaniard Jesus Mera, who was 12 years old when he began playing with his Game Boy Color.

It was a revolution you could play video games anywhere, said the 26-year-old Madrid native during a visit to Tokyo.

Mera was delighted to spot the same type of Game Boy he used to play for hours on end in the gaming store in Tokyo s bustling Akihabara electronics district.

He acknowledged that the small screen and games seem outdated, but in the past what we had was enough.

Nowadays we have so many possibilities, Mera said.

That isn t necessarily a good thing for people like 21-year-old student Lin Yuki, who sometimes struggles with today s hyper-fast world of 3D offerings where movement is limitless and tricky to master.

Recent games have become so complicated that you can be totally lost on what you re supposed to be doing, he said, admitting he sometimes feels nostalgic for simple games with black dots and horizontal scrolls.

2k Games Announces Temporary Shutdown of ’Borderlands’ and ’Civilizations’

2K Games announced Tuesday, April 22, that online services for "Borderlands" and "Civilizations" will be temporarily unavailable to make way for a seamless transition into the Steamworks platform.

With GameSpy’s servers set for permanent shutdown on May 31, 2K Games’ biggest franchises are slated for transfer to the Steamworks servers. The company, however, did not specify a timetable for the transition.

The temporary downtime will affect the original "Borderlands," "Civilization 3" and "Civilization 4", along with the all expansions of the Sid Meier titles. 2K Games is also assessing the feasibility of migrating "Civilization Revolution" and "Borderlands" PS3 version to other servers.

"During the transition, players will experience interruption of several features, including online play, matchmaking and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP)," the company said in a statement posted on the 2K Games blog.

It added that offline play will not be affected by the transition.

While "Borderlands" and "Civilizations" will not lose functionality with GameSpy closing down, 2K Games announced that a handful of its legacy games for PC will be going with Game Spy, including "Rune," "Close Combat First to Fight" and "Stronghold 2."

It will also discontinue online services for "NHL 2K10" for Wii and "Sid Meier’s Civilization Revolution" for Nintendo DS.

The full list of affected titles can be viewed on the 2K Games website. Other game developers, including Electronic Arts, Activision, Epic Games, Gearbox and Bohemia Interactive have also announced that many of their games will survive the GameSpy shutdown.

Crytek, however, said that Crysis and Crysis 2 multiplayer mode will no longer be available starting May 31.

"The conclusion of online multiplayer support comes as a result of GameSpy Technology shutting down all their hosting services," said the company in a statement on its official forum.

"GameSpy have been providing multiplayer functionality for Crysis and Crysis 2 since they launched. The single-player campaigns in both games are unaffected by this transition, and the multiplayer mode in the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions of Crysis 2 remain playable," Crytek added.

GameSpy is a matchmaking middleware for online games. Around 800 game studios have hosted their titles on GameSpy since it was launched in 1996. In 2000, IGN acquired GameSpy, whose new owner decided to discontinue all secondary websites including the newly acquired company.

"Effective May 31st, 2014, GameSpy will cease providing all hosted services for all games still using GameSpy. If you have any questions about how this impacts your favourite title, please contact the game’s publisher for more information. Thanks for a great ride!" reads a statement on the GameSpy website.

GameStop Corp. Seeking Future Growth Beyond Video Games

Paul Raines, chief executive officer of GameStop Corp., indicated that the largest multichannel video game and entertainment software retailer worldwide is seeking other future growth opportunities beyond video games.

The management of GameStop Corp. discussed the further evolution of the company, which was referred to as GameStop 3.0 , during the 2014 Investor Day held at Dallas, Texas on Tuesday, April 21.

According to Raines, video games are a huge business for GameStop Corp., and he noted that the growth of the segment will be driven by the Xbox One from Microsoft Corporation s, PlayStation 4 from Sony Corporation and the Wii U from Nintendo Co., Ltd.

He also emphasized that the company is focusing its attention on larger markets for future growth aside from physical and digital games, including the e-commerce market for non-gaming tech devices, the Apple Inc. ecosystem and the wireless market.

Raines emphasized that GameStop Corp. has already made investments in the Apple Inc. ecosystem. The video games and entertainment software retailer is currently buying, selling and accepting trade-ins for different iOS devices at its stores.

In addition, Raines said GameStop also owns Simply Mac, a sales and

service specialist for all Apple products including Mac computers, iPhone, iPad, iPod, and Apple TV, etc., and the company is planning to expand the Simply Mac brand with the support of Apple Inc.

Furthermore, Raines said, the opportunities for GameStop Corp. in the wireless market are just starting. According to him, the market for connected devices is expected to grow from $8 billion to $50 billion over the next five years.

Spring Mobile, a wireless solutions retailer, is a wholly-owned subsidiary of GameStop Corp., and it also operates Cricket Wireless stores, which were recently acquired by AT&T Inc. GameStop also has an exclusive distribution deal with AT&T Inc. and plans to expand with up to 250 new Spring Mobile stores.

Raines also pointed out that the management of GameStop Corp. are students of of extraordinary business transformation stories.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!

Atari Landfill in New Mexico To Be Dug Up on Saturday; Ars Will Be on Scene

The site in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where Atari is rumored to have buried some 3.5 million copies of the video game cartridge E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial is set to be dug up this Saturday.

Never wanting to miss an excavation, we've packed our bags, cashed in our frequent flyer miles, and booked our budget motel room to be on the scene when whatever is down there is dredged up be it hunks of plastic housing and cartridge chips or distilled evil sent to us by a superior alien race and hidden by the ghost warriors employed by Atari, which was really a front for a supernatural crime-fighting ring all along.

Fuel Entertainment Studios secured the rights to dig up the landfill with the help of local garbage contractor Joe Lewandowski, who told a TV news station that he witnessed the Atari dump in question back in 1983. Fuel then asked Microsoft's Xbox Entertainment Studios to help it make a documentary on Atari, which will be directed by Simon Chinn and produced by Jonathan Chinn.

The city of Alamogordo just recently gave the OK for the dig to proceed. So what's the likelihood that we'll find something down there once the cement poured over the landfill has been removed and the pit is dug up? Several prominent Atari employees have denied that millions of E.T. games were buried at Alamogordo, but it seems certain that anywhere from nine to 20 trucks dumped parts from an Atari factory in nearby El Paso, Texas, into the New Mexico landfill in 1983. Still, whether those parts are intact cartridges or just cruft from a factory in transition is a mystery until we see them.

This weekend, former Atari employee and E.T. programmer Howard Scott Warshaw will be on the scene, along with a number of Hollywood-types who will be filming the dig and a team of archaeologists who will sift through whatever the dig contractors find down there. Fans are invited to come down as well, so if you live in the area, drop by and say hi!

Diggers Ready To Unearth Atari s E.T. Games

Hidden for three decades in a landfill deep in the New Mexico desert lie thousands of Atari cartridges from what is widely believed to be worst video game ever made or so the urban legend goes.

A group of filmmakers hopes to get to the bottom of the mystery Saturday by digging up the concrete-covered landfill in search of up to a million discarded copies of E.T. The Extraterrestrial that the game s maker wanted to hide forever. The game and its contribution to the demise of Atari have been the source of fascination for video game enthusiasts for 30 years, and the search for the cartridges will be featured in an upcoming documentary about the biggest video game company of the early 80s.

Bottom line, this is just trash. But there is a legend in it, we want to unlock that legend, that mystery, a spokeswoman for the public relations firm working on behalf of Xbox Entertainment Studios, one of the companies developing the film. The documentary is expected to be released later this year on Microsoft s Xbox game consoles.

The event is expected to draw hundreds of video game enthusiasts, pop culture fans and self-described geeks to Alamogordo, a small town in southeastern New Mexico that is home to an Air Force base and White Sands National Monument. A pre-dig party is planned for Friday night with Atari games and free T-shirts for the first 250 people at the site.

Whether - and most importantly, why - Atari decided to bury thousands or millions of copies of the failed game is part of the urban legend and much speculation on Internet blog posts and forums.

Kristen Keller, a spokeswoman at Atari, said nobody here has any idea what that s about. The company has no corporate knowledge about the Alamogordo burial. Atari has changed hands many times over the years, and Keller said, We re just watching like everybody else. Atari currently manages about 200 classic titles such as Centipede and Asteroids. It was sold to a French company by Hasbro in 2001.

A New York Times article from Sept. 28, 1983, says 14 truckloads of discarded game cartridges and computer equipment were dumped on the site. An Atari spokesman quoted in the story said the games came from its plant in El Paso, Texas, some 80 miles south of Alamogordo.

Local news reports from the time said that the landfill employees were throwing cartridges there and running a bulldozer over them before covering them with dirt and trash.

The city of Alamogordo agreed to give the documentarians 250 cartridges or 10 percent of the cartridges found, whichever is greater, according to local media reports.

The E.T. game is among the factors blamed for the decline of Atari and the collapse in the U.S. of a multi-million dollar video game industry that didn t bounce back for several years.

Tina Amini, deputy editor at gaming website Kotaku, says the game tanked because it was practically broken. A recurring flaw, she said, was that the character of the game, the beloved extraterrestrial, would fall into traps that were almost impossible to escape and would appear constantly and unpredictably.

The company produced millions of cartridges and although sales were not initially bad, the frustrating gameplay prompted an immense amount of returns. They had produced so many cartridges that were unsold that even if the game was insanely successful I doubt they d be able to keep up, Amini says.

Joe Lewandowski, who became manager of the 300-acre landfill a few months after the cartridge dump and has been a consultant for the documentarians, told The Associated Press that they used old photographs and dug exploratory wells to find the actual burial site. A spokeswoman for Xbox said they*ve dug to remove the upper layers of trash in preparation for Saturday s dig.

Lewandowski says he remembers how the cartridge dump was a monstrous fiasco for Atari, at least from the perspective of a small desert town. The company, he says, brought truckloads from El Paso, where at the time scavenging was allowed in the city s landfills. Here, they didn t allow scavenging. It was a small landfill, it had a guard.

The guard, however, was either away or unable to stop scores of teenagers from rummaging through the Atari waste and showing up in town trying to sell the discarded products and equipment from the backs of pickup trucks, Lewandowski, said. That s when they decided to pour concrete over.

The incidents following the burial remained as part of Alamogordo s local folklore, he said. For him E.T. the game did not stir any other memories than an awful game he once bought for his kid.

 I was busy merging two garbage companies together, he said. I didn t have time for that.

Museum Acquires ’Virtually Complete’ Source Code from Atari’s Arcade Heyday

Acquiring the source code to virtually every coin-op game Atari made when it dominated the early 1980s arcade scene Asteroids, Missile Command, Centipede would seem to be enough of a coup. Yet for Jeremy Saucier, the most intimate contact with that era comes in the thousands and thousands of pages of paperwork, much of it routine.

Test-market reports. Focus group results. Written intel on what someone at Atari, for example, thought of Williams’ Joust, how that was going to do as a competitor, and what Atari should do in reply.

"You see how this critical company worked at a critical time," Jeremy Saucier, assistant director of the International Center for the History of Electronic Games (ICHEG), told Polygon, "and how they saw the

industry."

ICHEG and its home, the Strong National Museum of Play, today announced the acquisition of what is practically the corporate archive for Atari Games' coin-operated division: Twenty-two palettes' worth of material, bought some 15 years ago by a collector in California, and trucked to Rochester, N.Y.

The obvious jewels including the code and original cabinet silkscreens for a test game that only produced two units will likely go on display in some form. The bulk of what was acquired may have little impact as an exhibition but should provide critical context to researchers studying the advent of video games in the 1970s and 1980s.

The fact a company hung on to these kinds of workaday documents, and someone saw fit to buy it all up as an historical record, is a lucky break for researchers, said Jon-Paul Dyson, ICHEG's director and the vice president for exhibits at The Strong.

"The video game industry has always moved so fast, it's always forward-looking 'What is the next game? What do we do for the next quarter?'" Dyson said. "But I think Atari, because it is the company that more or less founded the industry, it had this interest, in how it operated, in this preservation of its legacy."

"All of this stuff was bought up when Midway Games, after acquiring Atari Games (the coin-op division spun off from the main company after the mid-1980s home console crash) shut it down in 2003. A man named Scott Evans, who worked in electronics recycling and salvaging, bought the material from a liquidation sale. "He recognized the importance of it all when he saw people were tossing out this stuff," Saucier said.

Evans kept the material in storage for years. He'd made donations to ICHEG before, and that relationship led to a long conversation that culminated with today's donation.

One of the specimens included is Maze Invaders, an unreleased Atari coin-op game from 1981 heavily inspired by Namco's Pac-Man and Stern Electronics' Berzerk. Ed Logg, the programmer of Asteroids and, later, Gauntlet, was assigned to build it. "They put it on a test program and it didn't do well," Dyson said. "It only produced a couple of units. You can see how it took tons of games to get to an Asteroids, and how one of the most successful designers of the 20th century, even he had his failures."

The code is stored on 8-inch floppy disks when floppy really meant floppy. Saucier and Dyson said they are confident that they will have "a high rate of success" recovering that code to more stable media. "Some of it will be a challenge to get at," Saucier said, "but I know the collector [Evans] has read some of the discs."

Just as critical to the understanding of these games' development are the numerous binders charting their development, Saucier said. The one for Asteroids, for example, begins with Logg's handwritten notes on the control setup (Asteroids was a button-only game) and the sound effects. "These binders include production schedules, what will be done at what time, cost estimates," Saucier said.

 It's like 'if we were able to get Gutenberg's business records, and tell how he was able to create the printing press.'

"It may be like, if we were able to get Gutenberg's business records, and tell completely how he was able to create the printing press," Dyson explained. "Coin-op is what launched the video game industry, and it still has reverberations to this day."

Other materials acquired include 2,800 videos on a number of formats of the day Betamax and VHS, for example showing things from focus group reactions, to game demonstrations, Atari's participation in industry expos, and even office parties.

"I don't know what those will look like," joked Saucier, "but we'll let you know."

Saucier said even with many of the specimens identified and their importance well known, it will take some time to catalog everything and curate an exhibit for the public. Much, much more will be held in an archive for researchers to access.

The Strong recently acquired the games collection and business records of Broderbund Software, the publisher of Myst and the original publisher of Prince of Persia. And last year, it exhibited "Atari By Design," which showcased concept documents of several Atari games next to playable versions. Some 50 Atari cabinets already are in The Strong's collection of arcade pinball and video games.

So it's not necessarily the games, but maybe something more mundane, that makes this acquisition so valuable.

"It's the kind of thing that is very ephemeral," Saucier said. "It's hard to find this sort of thing in an archive. The things you see here are actual field reports from field tests. There are reports coming back, saying how Asteroids did when it was on its first field tests. There are reports where Atari representatives went to a game show, and they're writing a report on what they think of Joust, and what they think it's going to do.

"It's a body of information not just about Atari, but about the industry as well."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

What You Don't Know About Heartbleed Should Scare You

Eighteen days ago, the world first learned of the Heartbleed bug, a flaw in open-source software code commonly used to protect information held behind passwords online.

It's a big, big problem. The initial media frenzy rightly focused on the implications for mass-market consumer tools, such as Gmail, Facebook,

Twitter and LinkedIn, but it’s caused real headaches in medium and large business enterprises as well.

We’re all paying a lot less attention to that part, but of course it’s more complicated and arguably more dangerous, if any given company’s security is seriously compromised. So now that the initial buzz has died down, I spoke with Fairfield, Conn.-based enterprise IT consultant Tim Reed about what business is doing or not doing about Heartbleed.

Fundamentally, do executives really understand the problem?

No, executives do not understand the problem, nor do they understand the ramifications of the issue. In the rush to introduce new capabilities and drive more business, most organizations have not been paying attention to the risks of third-party tools, open source code or increased areas of exposure. Heartbleed is a massive security bug that has been found in OpenSSL, which is open source code. The OpenSSL code is a communication protocol that contains secure keys, which encrypt the data flowing between companies. This virus has been able to actively ping a service and obtain active data. Today, the OpenSSL code is widely used in web browsing, email, VOIP and instant messaging.

Entrepreneurism thrives, in part, because third-party applications and open source code makes it cheap. Do you expect any real reconsideration of the trade-offs?

Yes, my view is that most organizations have not had a legitimate discussion about the trade-offs and the impact to their business models. In most cases, the discussion has been "after the fact" or the result of a production issue that has impacted business delivery.

The reality is that today’s IT market place contains a number of game-changing capabilities, via open source code, third-party applications and other services that internal IT organizations cannot build or replicate on their own. To effectively use the market place and make it a competitive advantage, organizations have to improve their approaches, use IT best practices to pro-actively address service delivery, security, risk and exposure.

What are clients demanding of you in light of the problem? Business leadership is demanding to understand the current exposure and what is it doing to their business. Business leadership is rapidly changing its view on IT security and privacy, demanding to understand the current exposure and redefine what should be done going forward. At the same time, technology leadership is attempting to explain how OpenSSL contained a virus for over two years.

What needs to happen right now to respond to Heartbleed? What should happen in the next 6 weeks?

Right now, the focus needs to on remediating the current exposure and imbedding best practices to pro-actively address the risk and limit exposure. Leadership should be focusing on:

Expose the use of open source code. Organizations need to understand where open source is being used, how it is embedded throughout current applications, internal development and third-party services. Few companies have an accurate view of what has been used and it s current state. New views of the extended enterprise via IT must be created and monitored.

Reset internal IT and third-party service requirements. In most cases, contractual security requirements are not accurate nor setup to address this exposure. Contractual language, and operating requirements should be examined, defined and reset to clarify the roles and responsibilities of vendors and third-party applications.

Strengthen the focus on risk. In addition to rapidly communicating the need to remediate the current issue, and take action (e.g., strengthen passwords) , there is a ton of work to be done to strengthen the focus on risk and compliance.

F.C.C., in Net Neutrality Turnaround, Plans To Allow Fast Lane

The Federal Communications Commission will propose new rules that allow Internet service providers to offer a faster lane through which to send video and other content to consumers, as long as a content company is willing to pay for it, according to people briefed on the proposals.

The proposed rules are a complete turnaround for the F.C.C. on the subject of so-called net neutrality, the principle that Internet users should have equal ability to see any content they choose, and that no content providers should be discriminated against in providing their offerings to consumers.

The F.C.C.’s previous rules governing net neutrality were thrown out by a federal appeals court this year. The court said those rules had essentially treated Internet service providers as public utilities, which violated a previous F.C.C. ruling that Internet links were not to be governed by the same strict regulation as telephone or electric service.

The new rules, according to the people briefed on them, will allow a company like Comcast or Verizon to negotiate separately with each content company like Netflix, Amazon, Disney or Google and charge different companies different amounts for priority service.

That, of course, could increase costs for content companies, which would then have an incentive to pass on those costs to consumers as part of their subscription prices.

Proponents of net neutrality have feared that such a framework would empower large, wealthy companies and prevent small start-ups, which might otherwise be the next Twitter or Facebook, for example, from gaining any traction in the market.

The F.C.C. plans were first reported online Wednesday by The Wall Street Journal.

The new proposals, drafted by the F.C.C.’s chairman, Tom Wheeler, and his staff, will be circulated to the other four commissioners beginning Thursday, an F.C.C. spokeswoman said. The details can be amended by consensus in order to attract support from a majority of the commissioners. The commission will then vote on a final proposal at its May 15 meeting.

FCC To Lay Out New ’Net Neutrality’ Rules

The Federal Communications Commission is set to propose on Thursday a new set of rules governing Internet access, according to The Wall Street Journal.

The new rules would prevent Internet service providers from blocking or disrupting traffic to specific Web sites, but they would also let companies pay for special access directly to customers, allowing for superior service.

The proposal could irk supporters of Net Neutrality, who believe that all access to the Internet should be equal, and that charging for special access benefits larger companies over smaller ones.

The Journal said the deals would have to be struck on "commercially reasonable" terms for all parties, noting that the terms would be decided by the FCC on a case-by-case basis.

Such a plan would allow media-streaming sites such as Netflix or sports Web site ESPN to pay extra to ensure that their traffic would get to customers in a speedy, unobstructed manner. Any agreement would affect traffic only at the last part of the network, which directly touches the customer. Netflix, for instance, struck a deal with Comcast for better access in the interchange part of the network that isn’t affected by Net Neutrality rules.

An FCC spokesman wasn’t immediately available for comment.

The FCC was widely expected to propose new rules after a federal appeals court threw out FCC’s Open Internet rules in a case filed by Verizon. But in doing so, the court also sided with the FCC in reaffirming its ability to regulate broadband services.

Rather than go through the courts again, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said the commission would take a different path toward the open Internet.

The FCC has decided not to reclassify broadband as a public utility, which would enable a new set of more rigorous rules, the Journal said.

Proposed US Rules Leave Open Internet Fast Lanes

Internet fast lanes that defy the ideal of "net neutrality" would be allowed under rules proposed by US regulators eager to keep broadband service providers from abusing their power.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on Thursday laid out a proposal to make sure Internet service providers don’t discriminate when it comes to data coursing through online pipes.

The rules wouldn’t prevent Internet service providers (ISPs) from letting technology titans such as Netflix or Google pay for faster data speeds but would require competing traffic move at "reasonable" speeds.

The "open Internet notice of proposed rule making" sent from FCC chief Tom Wheeler to the full commission was pounced on by critics as a betrayal of the goal of keeping the Internet "neutral" by preventing some

online traffic from getting priority over other content.

"FCC proposed rules create incentives for discrimination," read a Twitter post by Stacey DePolo. "Fight back. Demand real net neutrality."

The post linked to an online petition urging Wheeler to scrap the proposed rules in favor of a non-discrimination stance that involves reclassifying broadband providers as telecommunications services subject to FCC authority.

The FCC was adamant that it remains committed to net neutrality and is trying to create rules that can withstand legal scrutiny.

Two prior attempts, the most recent in 2010, by the FCC to hold broadband service providers to standards were stymied by US District Court decisions that such moves were outside the agency’s scope of authority.

Wheeler seized on part of the most recent court decision that suggests the FCC has power to take action if ISPs act in "commercially unreasonable" ways.

The proposed rules "follow the roadmap established by the court as to how to enforce rules of the road that protect an open Internet," Wheeler said in a blog post.

"To be very direct, the proposal would establish that behavior harmful to consumers or competition by limiting the openness of the Internet will not be permitted," the FCC chairman maintained.

Lobbying Efforts Intensify After F.C.C. Tries 3rd Time on Net Neutrality

In the nine weeks since the Federal Communications Commission said it would try, for a third time, to write new rules to secure an open Internet, at least 69 companies, interest groups and trade associations over one a day have met with or otherwise lobbied commission officials on what the rules should specify.

That effort does not count the more than 10,000 comments that individuals have submitted to the F.C.C.

Now the flood of lobbying efforts is likely to increase after the disclosure Wednesday evening that the F.C.C. would soon release preliminary rules allowing for the creation of special, faster lanes for online content to flow to consumers for content providers willing to pay for it.

The F.C.C. had previously warned against those types of deals, saying they could unfairly discriminate against companies that could not or were not willing to pay. But after a federal appeals court struck down, for a second time, the commission s earlier regulations, the F.C.C. is trying again.

Reaction was swift to the proposed new rules, as consumer groups accused the commission of betraying its promise to maintain net neutrality, or equal treatment for both providers to and users of the Internet. That prompted an immediate rebuttal from the F.C.C. chairman, Tom Wheeler, who said late Wednesday that speculation that the commission was gutting the

open Internet rule was flat out wrong.

The jockeying continued on Thursday. Verizon, which brought the court challenge that prompted the last set of open Internet rules to be struck down in January, issued a statement warning against unnecessary and harmful new rules. Consumer advocates reiterated their opposition.

Mr. Wheeler stepped up his defense of the commission s plans. The proposal would establish that behavior harmful to consumers or competition by limiting the openness of the Internet will not be permitted, he wrote in a post on the F.C.C.'s blog.

The sparring will be closely watched by every company that depends, even peripherally, on the Internet which is to say, just about every company. Businesses that use Internet connections to provide consumer services obvious ones like Google and Netflix but also home alarm system providers, medical equipment companies and even makers of washers and dryers will thrive or fail based on how much it costs them to maintain easy online contact with households and businesses.

As such, the lobbying ahead of the release of the proposed new rules on May 15 is certain to be intense. As recently as Tuesday, officials from the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, which represents cable and broadband companies and is led by Michael K. Powell, a former F.C.C. chairman, met with commission staff members to discuss the pending proposals.

For Internet service providers, video distributors, movie studios and even medical companies, lobbying efforts will center on what it means for a broadband provider to favor some content over another in a commercially reasonable way the standard that the F.C.C. says will determine whether a practice is acceptable.

The F.C.C. says its proposal will show that it is trying to accomplish most, if not all, of the same goals that it pursued in its 2010 Open Internet Order, which the appeals court struck down.

The court of appeals made it clear that the F.C.C. could stop harmful conduct if it were found to not be commercially reasonable,' Mr. Wheeler wrote in his post. The commission will propose rules that establish a high bar for what is commercially reasonable, he said.

In addition, he wrote, the commission believes it has the authority under Supreme Court precedent to identify behavior that is flatly illegal.

For years, many advocates of a free Internet have said that information should never have to pay a toll to ride on the web. But as traffic and competition has increased, much of it from big video providers like Netflix, the Internet has been becoming more congested and regulators have struggled to catch up with new digital realities.

Brazil Passes Bill on Internet Privacy

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff on Wednesday ratified a bill guaranteeing Internet privacy and enshrining access to the Web during a major conference in Sao Paulo on the future of Internet governance.

The legislation, which was passed by the Senate late Tuesday, puts limits on the metadata that can be collected from Internet users in Brazil. It also makes Internet service providers not liable for content published by their users and requires them to comply with court orders to remove offensive material.

Brazil has cast itself as a defender of Internet freedom following revelations last year that Rousseff was the object of surveillance by the U.S. National Security Agency. She cancelled a state visit to the United States last October over the revelations, which came out of leaks by former NSA analyst Edward Snowden and showed Brazil's state-run Petrobras was also the object of American spying.

Rousseff had championed a measure requiring Internet companies to store the data of Brazilian users inside the country, as a way of protecting citizens from further U.S. spying, but clause was cut from the final bill amid fears it would prove too challenging to implement.

Rousseff signed the bill into law early Wednesday ahead of her opening remarks at the NETmundial conference in Sao Paulo. Representatives from dozens of countries were in attendance, as were top Internet figures including a Google vice president and the head of the U.S.-based organization that coordinates the Internet naming system.

Rousseff praised Congress for passing the legislation, which she said "guarantees the neutrality of the Web, which is fundamental to maintaining the Internet's free and open nature."

"Our legislation can influence the worldwide debate aimed at finding a way to guarantee real rights in a virtual world," Rousseff's official blog quoted her as saying.

The blog also quoted Justice Minister Jose Eduardo Cardozo as hailing the legislation as "historic" and a "victory for Brazilian society, for the Brazilian government and for the Brazilian legislature."

"I believe that neutrality, privacy, freedom and the absence of discrimination that the text guarantees are really going to put Brazil in the vanguard, as a model for various other countries that are going to want to recreate the same principles, the same condition that are enshrined in our law," Cardozo was quoted as saying.

Russian Social Media CEO Quits, Flees Country

The founder of Russia's leading social media network a wunderkind often described as Russia's Mark Zuckerberg has left his post as CEO and fled the country as cronies of President Vladimir Putin have made steady inroads into the company's ownership.

The slow-motion ouster of Pavel Durov from the network known as VKontakte, or "In Contact," is the latest sign that independent media outlets in Russia have become increasingly imperiled.

Although months in the making, the loss of Durov's leadership in VKontakte means that the space for free speech on the Russian web could shrink even further.

Users on VKontakte were even spreading jokes this week that the new nickname for the "In Contact" website should be "In Censorship."

As one of his final acts of defiance, Durov posted online last week what he said were documents from the security services, demanding personal details from 39 Ukraine-linked groups on VKontakte, also known as VK.

Kremlin pressure on VK has been accompanied by increasing enforcement of Russia's law against extremism, which took some prominent opposition and pro-Ukraine sites off the web in March.

On Tuesday, the Russian parliament passed a law requiring social media websites to keep their servers in Russia and save all information about their users for at least half a year. The same law, which will go into effect in August if signed by Putin, gave bloggers the same legal status and responsibilities as media outlets, making them more vulnerable to accusations of libel or extremism.

Since the protests began in Ukraine, Putin and much of Russian media have amplified the patriotic rhetoric, proclaiming the need to secure Russia from enemies both foreign and domestic. In a televised call-in show last week, Putin equated those critical of Kremlin policy in Ukraine with Bolshevik revolutionaries who rooted for Russia's defeat in World War I, and discussions about the country's traitorous Fifth Column have become the fare of state television.

VK, which largely resembles an older version of Facebook, attracts about 60 million users daily, primarily from countries in the former Soviet Union, vastly outstripping Facebook's reach in the region. It played an instrumental role in bringing hundreds of thousands of protesters into the streets in late 2011 in the wake of widely manipulated parliamentary elections, and it has played a part in drawing crowds to the Kiev protest movement that helped oust Ukraine's pro-Russian president in February.

"There's been a trend that started with the protests of December 2011, when the authorities started fearing the crowd and especially the online crowd," said Anton Nossik, Russia's leading Internet entrepreneur. "The pressure of censorship is mounting on Russian websites from lawmakers who think that the Internet is their foe."

The 29-year-old Durov has cultivated a reputation as a rebel willing to stand up to Kremlin pressure, ostentatiously refusing to shut down VK groups linked to the Russian opposition movement or to give out personal information on its leaders.

He also has become known for more eccentric stunts, like throwing paper airplanes made of 5,000 ruble notes (about $140 each) out of his office window, or posting a picture of his middle finger online after breaking up a major deal with a pro-Kremlin investor.

Since opening in 2006, VK has thrived on the same devil-may-care reputation as its founder. While much of the website's success was thanks to Facebook's sluggish adaptation to the Russian market, VK cemented its status as a Russian staple by hosting thousands of pirated video and music files, which users can watch for free.

It didn't take long for VK to attract the attention of investors as well as the government. In 2010, one major investor who was friendly with Durov handed his stake in the company over to Mail.ru Group, a holding company

owned by Russia’s richest man and Putin crony Alisher Usmanov.

That move was followed by a large sell-off by Durov’s old allies in April 2013 to UCP, a company reportedly owned by Igor Sechin, the chief of Russian oil giant Rosneft and a member of Putin’s inner circle.

That left Durov himself, who only learned of the deal after it had been signed, as the last remaining holdout in the company ownership. He stayed on as CEO, but increasingly found himself in standoffs with its new stakeholders.

"A shareholder war started," said Nikolai Kononov, who wrote the book "Durov’s Code" about VK. "It seems that Durov already understood at that moment that he should sell his shares. But at the same time, he wanted to preserve the project he built, as well as his reputation. Hence why it’s taken so long."

That same month, a criminal investigation was opened into Durov’s alleged participation in a hit-and-run incident with a St. Petersburg police officer a case that Durov’s supporters said was fabricated and linked to political pressure on the organization.

In June 2013, the case against Durov was quietly closed, but the message it sent was clear. In January, he sold his remaining 12 percent share in the company to Ilya Tavrin, another businessman linked to Usmanov. He also moved to diversify his portfolio outside Russia: With the help of his brother, he developed the messenger service Telegram, a Berlin-based company that he marketed as a completely hack-resistant communication tool, impenetrable even to the prying eyes of the National Security Agency.

If Durov wanted to develop Telegram and cultivate a name for himself as an uncompromising businessman abroad, that would mean keeping VK free of Kremlin influence as long as he was CEO of the company. Kononov said.

But Durov’s timing couldn’t have been worse: After Putin returned to the presidency in 2012 amid the large anti-Kremlin street protests, he tried to consolidate his power by passing a series of laws clamping down on the opposition.

Many deemed social media, which had provided a platform for protest leaders, a likely next casualty. This spring, the Livejournal blog of opposition leader and anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny was wiped off the web. For VK, which continued to allow groups in support of Navalny or Ukraine’s protest movement to exist, it appeared it would only be a matter of time before its pro-Kremlin investors would start cracking down.

Durov’s exit from the company was drawn out and chaotic. After selling his shares in January, Durov posted a message April 1 that he was quitting the company only to say two days later it had been an April Fool’s joke.

On Tuesday, he said he had been fired from the company and only found out through the media. One of the pro-Kremlin stakeholders claimed Durov had signed his own resignation letter a month ago and never withdrew it, while another insisted that Durov had no right to quit. Durov is being sued by one of the stakeholders, UCP, which accuses him of diverting money and programming talent from VK and using them to develop Telegram instead.

Durov told the technology magazine Techcrunch that he had left Russia and had no plans to return in the near future.

"In this way, today VKontakte will be transferred to the full control of Igor Sechin and Alisher Usmanov," he wrote on his VK page Monday night. "Under the conditions in Russia something like this was probably inevitable, but I am happy that we held out for seven and a half years. We did a lot."

Putin Calls Internet 'CIA Project'

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday called the Internet a "CIA project" and warned Russians against making Google searches.

Putin assured a group of young journalists that the Internet was controlled from the start by the CIA and its surveillance continues.

"That's life. That's how it's organised by Americans. You know all of this started during the dawn of the Internet as a special project of the CIA. And it keeps on developing," Putin said in televised comments.

Responding to questions from a young pro-Kremlin blogger, Putin warned that information entered on Google "all goes through servers that are in the States, everything is monitored there".

He also made ominous comments on Russia's most popular search engine Yandex, suggesting it could become more tightly controlled.

Yandex is "partly registered abroad and not just for tax reasons, but for other reasons too", Putin said, mentioning it is partly owned by international investors and reiterating his fear of foreign control of the Internet.

When Yandex was starting out, Putin said, they were "pressured" to have "that many Americans and this many Europeans among the executives".

"We must fight determinedly for our own interests. This process is happening. And we will support it from the government side, of course," he said without explaining what he means in detail.

Yandex handles some 60 percent of search queries in Russia and has a presence in several other countries. It allows users to search blogs and rates the most popular entries.

Yandex's shares fell over 4.3 percent on the NASDAQ after Putin's comments.

The company said in a statement quoted by news agencies that registration abroad is not done to dodge taxes but due to issues of corporate law, while foreign investment is a common feature of any Internet startup.

"Since our main business is in Russia, we pay almost all taxes in Russia," Yandex said.

While the Internet remains the main sphere for political discussion, Russia has recently cracked down on debate, with a new law allowing the

government to block blacklisted sites without a court order.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny had his popular blog blocked and a widely read news site that covered opposition causes sacked its long-term editor and changed its stance after a warning on extremism from the state watchdog.

Russia this week passed in its initial stage new legislation that would force popular bloggers to register their sites and comply with similar regulations as mass media.

The 61-year-old president has frequently been scathing about the Internet, which he once described as "half pornography", unlike Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who posts snaps on Twitter.

Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov insisted this month that the president is a regular Internet user and even sometimes laughs at jokey Photoshopped images.

State of the Hack: 43% of All DDoS Attacks in Q4 Originated in China

The threat from hackers is very real and a new report shows that things are only getting worse. We recently told you about a terrifying new interactive map that shows global cyberattacks happening in real time. If that map seemed surprisingly busy to you, it s because it is a new study from Akamai shows that hackers attacked websites 75% more frequently in the fourth quarter last year than in the previous quarter.

The study, which was picked up on Wednesday by Engadget, covers DDoS attacks launched against websites around the world. Akamai says that business websites were the most likely targets and the odds of a repeat attack are now one in three.

A disconcerting 43% of all DDoS attacks in the fourth quarter originated in China, with the U.S. and Canada representing the No. 2 and No. 3 points of origin for attacks. Akamai notes that attacks originating in Canada were up a shocking 2,500% over the same quarter in 2012.

On the plus side, Akamai also observed that average Internet speeds were up 5.5% globally to 3.8Mbps in the fourth quarter, and Internet penetration climbed 3% over the third quarter last year.

The 12 Spammiest Countries on Earth

Americans like to associate their spam with other countries. They joke about Chinese spammers, or Nigerians or Russians. It s a time-honored nativist tradition.

But, according to the new quarterly report from the security and spam monitoring company Sophos, computers inside the United States relay by far the most spam. And we have in every quarter of the past year.

To be clear, Sophos doesn t measure the point of origin for the spam, but something more embarrassing and troubling. Spam is relayed by compromised

computers strung into vast networks called botnets. So what we really see here is the deeply insecure state of American computing, more than the number of ne er-do-wells.

According to the 2013 spam trend report by Kaspersky security, nearly 70 percent of email traffic flow is now spam. (It s worth looking at Kaspersky s list of spammy countries by email point of origin: China is number one, but we re number two.)

Apple Fixes Serious Bug: Download the Update Now

Yet another serious security bug has been located and patched, this time in Apple s iOS mobile platform and two versions of its desktop counterpart OS X. Updates to iOS and OS X, released yesterday (April 22) patch a flaw that leaves some data transmissions wide open to snoops, along with several other software flaws particular to each platform.

The Triple Handshake bug, as it s called, affects all versions of iOS, plus OS X 10.8 Mountain Lion and 10.9 Mavericks. The patch is part of Apple s latest update, which also includes patches for several other more minor issues in Safari, Apple TV, and other Apple products. Mobile users should upgrade to iOS 7.1.1 (up from 7.1), and OS X users should install the available updates.

The bug is located in the secure transport mechanism, which regulates the Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption that protects inbound and outbound traffic. It affects only applications that use client certificates to establish secure connections with verified users.

The name Triple Handshake comes from the way the bug operates: Attackers could create two encrypted connections, or handshakes, on an affected device, and then insert their own data into one of the connections, thereby creating a handshake between the attacker s device and the target, entirely circumventing SSL encryption and proper authentication.

By exploiting this bug, cybercriminals could conduct man-in-the-middle attacks, capturing unprotected data in transit to and from affected devices.

Because it affects only certain Apple applications that use certificates, experts say the Triple Handshake bug is less serious than the Goto Fail bug, a separate flaw in Apple SSL connections discovered and patched in February. It s far less severe than the Heartbleed bug discovered earlier this month, which was also SSL-based, because Heartbleed affected so many websites and networking devices, and exploits based on it would have been difficult to detect.

Still, Triple Handshake is serious for the people affected, and the end result is the same as Goto Fail and Heartbleed: Supposedly protected information is laid bare. Owners of iOS devices should update to the new version, iOS 7.1.1, which contains the Triple Handshake patch. The OS X versions, 10.8 Mountain Lion, or 10.9 Mavericks, don t get a new number in their names, but they do get patches that fix the issue.

OS X Lion (10.7), Mountain Lion (10.8), and Mavericks (10.9) all received

other security updates and patches, including a Safari upgrade to 7.0.3, which patches a few remote execution bugs in the browser. So if you missed the Safari upgrade, installing the OS X upgrade will also patch Safari.

OS X Snow Leopard 10.6 once again received no patches, which has led security experts to hypothesize that Apple is, at least unofficially, no longer supporting the 5-year-old operating system. Apple TV set-top boxes also got an upgrade, from 6.1 to 6.1.1.

Now YOU Can Try the Latest Apple Operating System Before It’s Released

Want to be the first on your block to try Apple s latest and greatest?

Well, we can t get you an iPhone 6. On Tuesday, however, Apple did announce something neat: a new initiative that will allow regular folks like you and me to try out the latest versions of OS X before they re released to the general public. Usually, this privilege is granted only to Apple-sanctioned developers, who had to pay $99 per year for the honor. Now, however, Apple has opened the program wider, to less technically savvy computer owners, and made it free to boot.

Those who are curious will get to try out beta releases of OS X in the weeks and months leading up to an official release, helping Apple find bugs and improve its software. TechCrunch s Darrell Etherington points out that we are a little over a month away from Apple s Worldwide Developers Conference, where the company could unveil its latest version of OS X.

The OS X Beta Seed Program, also known as Appleseed, let in its first non-developers on Tuesday and was first spotted by MacRumors.

The program is free to join, though you do have to sign a nondisclosure agreement (shhhh), possess an Apple ID, and agree to submit feedback to Apple. You re also potentially inconveniencing yourself, as early versions of operating systems can be buggy, slow, or nonfunctional at times. Updates are made available in the Mac App Store.

Microsoft, you might remember, ran a similar program for its Windows 8 operating system last year. And Google lets web surfers try out unstable, in-the-works versions of its web browser Chrome by clicking a box in the Settings menu.

The Appleseed program probably isn t the right path for non-techies to take. But if you re confident in yourself, and in Apple, you can find more information on Apple s website.

Apache OpenOffice Hits Major 100 Million Downloads Milestone in Under 2 Years

Microsoft’s Office may be the go-to productivity suite in the business world, but there’s apparently plenty of room out there for challengers to thrive: On Thursday, the Apache Software Foundation announced that the Apache OpenOffice suite has been downloaded a whopping 100 million times.

OpenOffice offers free and open-source document, spreadsheet, presentation, vector graphics, and database creation tools, along with a mathematical formula editor. More than 750 extensions and over 2,800 templates are available for the productivity suite at SourceForge.

Apache OpenOffice was born out of the ashes of the iconic OpenOffice.org. Oracle donated the OpenOffice.org code and trademark to the Apache Incubator in 2011, and OpenOffice became an Apache top-level project in late 2012.

"I’m extremely pleased to see us reach this major milestone in less than two years," Andrea Pescetti, vice president of Apache OpenOffice, said in a blog post announcing the milestone. "This is a testament to our community volunteers: the hundreds of talented individuals who make Apache OpenOffice what it is, who write the code, test for bugs, translate the user interface, write documentation, answer user questions, and manage our servers."

PCWorld found the suite to be a somewhat quirky yet completely viable Microsoft Office alternative when we reviewed OpenOffice 4.0 last September, and hey, you can’t beat the price. But it’s not the only open-source Office alternative in town.

Before OpenOffice.org was donated to the Apache Software Foundation, the open-source community feared for the project’s future under Oracle. LibreOffice another full-fledged, fully open, and downright wonderful productivity suite was forked from OpenOffice and is considered by many to be the true continuation of the OpenOffice.org project, complete with the same core features as OpenOffice. Since its release, LibreOffice has become the default productivity installation of choice for a number of Linux distributions, including Ubuntu, Debian, and Fedora.

Considering LibreOffice’s success and widespread community admiration, Apache OpenOffice’s 100 million downloads in less than two years seems even more impressive. No matter which open-source suite you prefer, one thing’s for certain: Microsoft Office may be the gorilla in the room, but productivity buffs don’t have to break the bank to get things done. LibreOffice and OpenOffice both rock.

Ad-free Bing for The Classroom, But Is It Just A Marketing Ploy by Microsoft?

Microsoft wants to be the go-to online search engine for students and is offering an ad-free version of Bing to K-12 educational institutions that it claims provides a safer web search experience for youths.

The program, "Bing in the Classroom," was initially deployed in a pilot program at five large school districts. It features a strict filtering feature to block any racy or inappropriate content.

So far, according to Microsoft, the program is now being used by hundreds of school districts and accessible to 4.5 million students.

The news comes as Microsoft continues its quest to be on par with Google and other longtime search players. Just last week Microsoft rolled out a new Bing feature, personalized information cards customized to a user’s preferences and interests. Bing, formerly known as Live Search then

Windows Live Search and then MSN Search, debuted in 2009 and also powers Yahoo! Search through a 10-year deal between Yahoo and Microsoft.

As part of the Bing educational strategy students can earn credits for their school using a rewards program if they use Bing on home and mobile computing devices.

"We created Bing in the Classroom because we believe students deserve a search environment tailored for learning," said Matt Wallaert, creator of the program, in a statement.

Wallaert claims the Bing program is purely altruistic, as Microsoft believes school and learning environments should be an ad-free Internet zone.

Google Updates Terms of Service To Reflect Its Scanning of Users' Emails

Google has updated its terms of service to reflect that it analyzes user content including emails to provide users tailored advertising, customized search results and other features.

The Internet giant s scanning of users email has been controversial with privacy groups describing it as an intrusion into user privacy.

Competitor Microsoft claims in its Don t Get Scroogled by Gmail campaign that its Outlook.com email service is superior to Gmail as unlike Google it does not go through email looking for keywords to target users with paid advertisements.
In a case in California over Google s interception of email, District Judge Lucy H. Koh said that Google s terms of service and privacy polices did not explicitly notify the plaintiffs that Google would intercept users emails for the purposes of creating user profiles or providing targeted advertising. Google s decision to change its terms of service may have been prompted by these comments.

In the consolidated multi-district litigation brought by users in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, San Jose division, the users alleged that Google had violated state and federal wiretapping laws by scanning the content of messages sent through Gmail, to serve ads to users among other things.

Google contended that Gmail and all Google Apps end users had explicitly consented to its alleged interceptions, relying on various terms of service and privacy polices in effect between 2008 and 2013, according to court records.

Judge Koh, however, denied class action status to the petitioners to the consolidated lawsuit. The plaintiffs have sought permission to appeal.

The new Google terms of service that went into effect on Monday adds the provision that Our automated systems analyze your content (including emails) to provide you personally relevant product features, such as customized search results, tailored advertising, and spam and malware detection. This analysis occurs as the content is sent, received, and when it is stored.

Google has amended its terms of service previously and its last such

change was in November last year.

The company did not immediately comment on why it had changed its terms of service again.

Google Glass Was Not Available To Everyone

It appears the site that made Glass available to anyone without an invite was a page that was created to accommodate potential Explorers from a one-day open sale last week. Google responded to an AndroidCommunity query saying the link quoted below was one that had gone unedited since the Apr. 15 sale. Links on the page are now grayed-out and you can no longer process an order.

It looks like Google may be close to finally releasing a consumer version of its heads-up display. Right now, anyone in the U.S. can get a unit of Glass for $1,500 via Google's website, without an invite. Plus, Google is waving the prescription frames fee of $225. It is unclear how long this sale will last.

The version of Glass that's available is still the Explorer edition. However, oddly Google has made no formal announcement about this change in policy, that reverses the previous policy that Explorers had to be invited to spend the cash.

Shoppers can choose to get Glass in one of five colors - Charcoal, Tangerine, Cotton (white), Shale (grey) or Sky (blue). You can also select one of four titanium frame designs that you can have fit with or without a prescription or one of three frames. Each Glass comes with a mono earbud, pouch, cable and charger, plus the frame you selected with a protective case.

This comes after a series of initiatives from the Glass team that made the previously exclusive device available to more and more people, including a one-day sale to everyone on Apr. 15 and a free try-before-you-buy initiative.
Google also rolled out an update (XE 16.1) last week to upgrade Glass firmware to Android KitKat and boost battery life. Sadly the update seems to have caused more problems than it solved. The company is still in the process of pushing through an XE 16.1.1 update to fix problems caused by XE 16.1, which bricked several Glasses.

The device's marketing head recently revealed that the initial limited availability was a deliberate move by Google to get passionate Explorers to test out the product and provide feedback. As a result, the device received plenty of criticisms about its polarizing design, poor battery life and steep price tag.

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